The Computer Centre Party

In the last few years we have witnessed the rise of a literary form known as the instant book. An event of interest takes place and almost immediately some publisher with a good nose for profits commissions a practiced writer to undertake the work. Only twenty-four hours after the moon shot had taken place a book hit the stands to take advantage of the wide range of interest the event had created. Now, a local publisher, Tuhdra Books, has commissioned Dorothy Eber to write not one, but two books on those events growing out of the Anderson Affair. In the first volume she takes us through the preliminary hearings and we can now anticipate her book on the trial.

The method of writing instant history is routine. The standard equipment for the job is the proverbial scissors and paste. Her book is then a collage of the many items which have already appeared in print, plus the results of a number of interviews. Given the limitations of the method one can not fault her on the product which is little better or worse than other efforts of this type.

Mrs. Eber set out to write a book that "takes no sides." She must be given full marks in this category, for she succeeds in rising above the passions that inflamed our entire community last year. Other books on the Anderson affair have been promised, but it is doubtful that their authors will strain for objectivity, or even care to. Yet Doro

Yet Dorothy Eber's objectivity comes at a price, and that price is the total absence of both analysis and the critical examination of herssources. She provides us with a good deal of undigested material representing all sides and it is up to the reader of the book to make any judgments which are called for.

She allows the participants to speak for themselves and there is no effort on her part to subject either their words or actions to any critical standard. Perhaps her ruling assumption is that of the Positivist

historians who believe that the facts speak for themselves, but even they subject their documentary materials they acquire to rigorous internal examination and the test of consistancy.

One striking instance of the lack of analysis is seen early in the book. She notes (p.30) that Professor Frank Chalk had on the afternoon of February 10 asked some of the black students occupiers about the prospoals submitted to the administration. "'Are these proposals negotiable,' he had asked and the answer had been 'yes'." Only a few pages later (33) she recounts the events of that night when the administration submitted its counter-proposals for further negotiation. Student Terrence Ballantyne was called that night and told by his fellow occupiers that the "University has rejected the proposal." The curious reader might want to know just when proposals, which the students said had been negotiable in the afternoon, became non-negotiable that night. Unfortunately this book does nothing to provide us with an answer, to this or many other questions.

A second instance of the failure of her critical facilities is exemplified in her interview technique. Dorothy Eber must be a very nice lady, for she obviously does not like to offend anyone. Her interviews end where they might get embarassing. Principal John O'Brien is not asked why he did not resist the attempt to allegedly coerce him to sign a document, but she points out that Professor Adamson did refuse to sign. Professor Chester Davis tells her "I know there was evidence. I saw it." (82) Yet, she does not ask Davis to reveal what the evidence, if any, was, thereby allowing him to plant the seed of suspicion against Anderson without having to account for it.

Despite its limitations the book has its value. One might begin to use it, for instance, to accumulate a fascinating collection of Sir George paranoia. There is Terrence Ballantyne's statement that many of the black students at one stage thought Chester Davis "was a member of the CIA." A Maoist student, Dennis Kay, tells us "there were all sorts of Pinkerton detectives too, undercover stuff." Surely the most enter-

taining was Professor Eugene Genovese's charge that the International-ists (a self-professed Maoist group), were controlled by"anti-communist agents." Genovese's charge, according to Commissioner Kelly of the RCMP, was just"academic piffle." It all makes one wonder if the academic community is particularly prone to such paranoic meanderings.

A few other minor items are worthy of note. One student among the accused, Mark Medicoff, asks Mrs. Ever: "We kept hearing the riot police were coming. Why did they wait so long?" Does this represent his indignation because the University failed to conform to some naive stereotype? Perhaps it is a crude attempt to hold the University responsible for building the frustrations of the occupiers. The question is puzzling, for it really admits of no answer. On the other hand, Graham Martin, Director of the Computer Centre, gives a partial answer to many of those who questioned the concern with property rather than humanity: "The total loss he says is in the neighborhood of thirty man years." That represents the work of people and those who are not overly concerned with the cash loss might at least pause to consider that more than dollar value was destroyed.

The Computer Centre Party will do little to force those within our community to examine themselves and their reactions to the events of last year. The outside reader of liberal persuasion will discover a book that issues no challenge. He may leave it with a feeling that the fire might have been avoided if only men of good will had discovered the means to communicate. A careful reading of this book, as well as some of the more recent statements of the accused students, should serve to convince the reader that by February Anderson himself was no longer an issue, but a victim. The issues then ranged from the general racism of our society and the University to the membership of Sir George in the "industrial military complex." (119) These were issues that no University could handle simply because they admitt of no solution within the limited scope of an educational institution. In other words, Sir George was being asked to give that which was never in its power to grant. The result was, in the words of Henry Hall; "many young people have been used.....their idealism has been used."